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Attitudes Towards Alternative
Work Arrangements --
A Qualitative Assessment Among
Employers In Metropolitan Toronto

FOREWORD

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Social Planning Council has recently conducted a quantitative survey among a systematically selected random sample of employers in Metropolitan Toronto. The purpose of the self-completion mail survey was to generate information on the extensiveness of specific programs that can aid employees with families. Results of the questionnaires have been tabulated and analyzed by the Social Planning Council.

The initial study design called for two stages. The first is the quantitative survey, and the second is comprised of follow-up personal interviews with a subset of the employers who responded to the quantitative survey.

The primary objectives of the second stage of the Working Families Project* are listed below:

- To provide greater understanding of why some employers offer services to families and others do not;
- To gain insight into the processes that facilitate or impede the development of programs which address the needs of working parents;
- To deepen understanding of how existing services to families are utilized within companies that offer them; and
- To learn how employers view the future of employer-provided services to working families.

* A project supported by a grant from the Ontario Women's Directorate.

Ultimately, these specific research objectives will contribute to the development of policy positions on the subject of employer-based services to working families.

METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the objectives described above, Ruston/Tomany & Associates Ltd. has undertaken a qualitative research program, comprised of individual in-depth interviews with a sample of 'willing' survey participants¹.

This form of interview requires that a trained qualitative research specialist meet with individual employers and discuss the topic under review in an open-ended format. A "discussion guide" was developed to give some structure to the interview, and to enumerate the issues that would be covered in the interview.

The development of the discussion guide was undertaken by Ruston/Tomany & Associates in conjunction with Laura Johnson, of the Social Planning Council. Since this guide is, in essence, a statement of the research objectives, it was submitted to the Working Families Committee for approval prior to use in the field. A copy of the guide is appended to this report.

A total of fifteen interviews was conducted with a sample of employers who had agreed to make themselves available for a personal follow-up interview. A telephone screening was undertaken from the initial list of potential respondents. During this screening call, a willingness to be interviewed was confirmed, and a time and date was set for the interview. All

¹Employers who returned the survey (494) were asked to write in their names and addresses if they were willing to be interviewed in the second stage of the research program. These names formed the 'universe' for selection of potential respondents in the qualitative research.

interviews were undertaken by trained Ruston/Tomany and Associates' personnel, were conducted in respondents' offices and were tape recorded. A copy of the telephone questionnaire used is appended to this report.

The interviewing stage of the study commenced on October 30th and was completed on November 26th, 1985.

Of the fifteen employers represented in the study, six were representatives of the private service sector, including health-care, a financial institution, chartered accountants, a law firm, a computer service bureau, and a life insurance company. Two were public sector service institutions, and seven represented both heavy and light private sector manufacturing, including pulp and paper, consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, computers, and publishing.

Most employers had at least 500 employees (12), two represented firms with 100 - 499 employees, and one represented a firm with between 50 - 99 employees. A list of the titles of the respondents is appended to this report.

FINDINGS

The findings of this qualitative research are presented in the pages that follow under two main headings:

- Executive Summary
- General Summary.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Alternative work arrangements are supported or opposed for a variety of societal, attitudinal, corporate and personal reasons.

Responses to questions about alternative work arrangements are largely influenced by the structure of an organization, by its perception of itself as a leader or a follower, or as a 'caring' or 'hard-line' employer, by the history of the organization, by its relationship to organized labour, by its competitive environment, and the like. The response is also influenced by the personnel director's or manager's personality, age, sex, and personal opinions.

In light of the scope and complexity of the factors that influence the content of the interviews, it is not surprising that personnel representatives do not speak with a unified voice. Even when they do say the same words, they do not necessarily mean the same things by them.

Because of the complexity of the topic area, a 'summary' cannot do justice to the breadth and depth of information collected or to the contradictions, the similarities and differences that arise through hours of discussion. For this reason, the reader is urged to explore the General Summary. It is only through a detailed analysis of the terminology and attitudes expressed by employers that the diversity of the subject reveals itself.

- Employers divide alternative arrangements into those which are policy-based, and those which are 'ad hoc'.

Alternative arrangements within most employment establishments represented in the study derive from a policy

decision or from the employer attempting to meet the needs of individual employees. In both cases, the business interests of the employer appear to take precedence over concerns about the strains created by work and family responsibilities.

For example, retraining and recruitment costs are taken into account when an existing employee indicates that he or she must either work fewer hours or leave the firm altogether. If, on balance, it is in the interests of the employer to offer a part-time or shared-job alternative, an arrangement may be generated.

According to personnel directors, some policy-based decisions derive from legislation (e.g., maternity and adoption leave), from collective agreements (e.g., compressed work weeks), or from a desire to adopt a leadership role in social programs (e.g., workplace daycare). Flex-time, on the other hand, seems to have grown out of initiatives by the TTC.

- Regardless of the derivation of the program, employers submit that an arrangement or policy is acceptable as long as the 'job gets done'.

Respondents comprehend the changing nature of the workforce, and are not oblivious to the pressures that working parents feel. At the same time, they do not tend to regard their decisions about alternative arrangements as prompted by these pressures. Of course, some employers are more conscientious than others in attempting to meet individual employee needs. These more socially minded employers initiate programs or institute pilot projects without obvious employee, legislative, or union pressure.

Other employers adopt the viewpoint that they are dealing with a 'worker'. The 'home' aspects of that person's life, including the pressures of parenthood, are of minimal concern to the employer. In these instances, there is little evidence of employer-generated programs that might aid the employee in meeting his or her dual responsibilities.

- Organizations in which a collective agreement with a labour union or an employee association exists seem to regard the bargaining unit as the 'advocate' of employees.

While no labour representatives are included in the sample, several organizations with collective agreements were interviewed. In these institutions, 'management' anticipates that the bargaining unit will raise issues pertinent to its members. Examples of the types of programs brought forward by the bargaining unit in this context include flexible hours, compressed work weeks, on-site daycare, paternity benefits, and extended maternity benefits.

Organized labour is viewed as an advocate for certain types of alternative work arrangements. Simultaneously, it is perceived by some employers as an opponent to possibilities such as part-time work and job-sharing.

- Alternative working arrangements, such as part-time, job-sharing and work-at-home are primarily associated with women in the work force rather than with men.

Throughout the interviews there is recurring testimony to support the hypothesis that alternative arrangements are

sought by, used by, and provided for female employees. The link between 'family' and 'motherhood' remains implicitly or explicitly intact as employers describe their opinions and personnel policies.

It is important to note, however, that most personnel representatives included in the study have direct responsibility for white collar, administrative or clerical staff. Their viewpoint is likely influenced by the prominence of women in this sector of the labour force.

- Definitions of specific alternative working arrangements or programs that aid working parents vary from employer to employer.

Terms such as 'flex-time' or 'part-time' or 'personal leave' do not share common meanings among the employers interviewed. A part-time work arrangement can be casual, temporary work that systematically excludes the employee from any benefits. Similarly, personal leave may entail discretionary leave for any reason, or could specify in detail the reasons for which an employee can be absent. In some instances, personal leave is paid leave; in others it is not.

The variability of definitions, and the complexities of the individual programs or policies raise important questions about how information is best communicated to people in decision-making positions within employment establishments. It is clear that simple phrasing may lead to an inaccurate portrayal of the exact service or benefit offered to employees.

- Employers claim to be overwhelmed by written information about alternative arrangements, but seem to be most comfortable obtaining testimonial evidence from their peers about the success or failure of a program.

Employers note that information is constantly traded and shared through professional associations, trade associations and the informal links that exist among the community of personnel representatives. This information source is trusted, largely because the spokesperson for an alternative program is a 'known commodity'.

Several individuals note that they are not interested in alternative arrangements 'in the abstract'. They want to talk with someone who has implemented a program. They want the benefit of someone else's first-hand experience.

- A list of employment establishments that offer various alternative arrangements would aid some employers in their own evaluation of the arrangement.

Because alternative situations such as work-at-home and job-sharing are relatively new and rare, some employers note that they have not been able to identify sources for the first-hand knowledge they seek. These individuals appear to be quite interested in having a 'central clearing house' that would identify companies or organizations that offer the programs. 'Models' for implementation of programs such as part-time work with pro-rated benefits are also identified as an information need.

- Implementation of alternative working arrangements in the future is likely to be characterized by caution.

Employers are exploring options for alternative working arrangements because they recognize that the values and needs of the workplace are changing. High technology, employee 'lifestyle' concerns, increasing numbers of women in the labour force, and the absence of a "lifer mentality" in younger employees are all said to influence the ways employers will adjust to the future. The options they explore in detail, and the alternatives they implement will reflect their own needs and corporate 'philosophy' as well as the demands of the labour force and legislation. Based on the interviews, it would seem fair to say that employers will move cautiously. Alternatives will begin in ad hoc or pilot forms, and only slowly will they be adopted as the 'rule' rather than as the 'exception'.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

While there is no apparent reason to suspect that the individuals taking part in this study are in any way atypical representatives of their particular population group, the reader is reminded that these findings are drawn from a relatively small number of respondents. These findings are not quantitative conclusions, but rather, qualitative insights, and as such, should be considered tentative, pending more rigorous validation.

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APPENDIX

INTRODUCTION

Almost by definition, a synthesis of the information provided by a diverse set of personnel professionals will minimize some of the subtle differences that emerge in face-to-face discussions. Unfortunately, the transformation of almost fifteen hours of tape recorded conversations into a coherent analysis results in the loss of expressions, hand gestures, voice quality and tone, and the like. At the same time, the critical research objectives of Stage II of the Working Families Project can only be met by reducing the vast amount of information collected into a logical set of findings. There are differences and similarities among the respondents. There are contradictions across and within interviews. Together, the various responses provide ample information on the complex nature of the corporate employer's response to employees and their needs as individuals, as parents, and as workers.

"You've got to recognize that an individual employee is not an isolated entity. That person comes, lock, stock and barrel with their family, their problems, their commitments outside. And if we can accommodate a little bit, that's fine. That person will be happier to work in an environment like that and he'll probably produce more for you over the long haul."

Pragmatism, "good business sense", attitudes towards employees' rights or privileges, the corporate structure, and the individual's personal values and perceptions of roles all contribute to discussions of alternative working arrangements.

It is important to understand that the subject of alternative work arrangements need not be approached in a context of reducing the strains of maintaining the dual role of worker and parent. In fact, several employers note quite specifically that alternative arrangements were established in their organizations, or might be considered in the future, but "not for those [stress reduction in the maintenance of two roles] reasons".

In the analysis that follows, two parallel 'types' of data are presented. One is a descriptive presentation of the arrangements offered, their origin and development, their impact on the organization, and their anticipated future impact. A second is a 'qualitative' appraisal of the attitudinal stances of individuals representing various employment sectors and sizes. These two types of data are structurally related, and as such, require that both be dealt with simultaneously in the analysis.

A. PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEES

In most of the cases, the company representatives we spoke with focus their comments on the realm of employees for whom they are directly responsible. This responsibility tends to exclude blue collar workers. That is, even in a company which has a sizeable complement of blue collar staff, the individuals designated as the appropriate person to complete the Working Families questionnaire, and subsequently to participate in the interview, do not have responsibility for these workers. Instead, their responsibilities are limited primarily to:

- clerical/administrative staff;
- clerical/administrative staff and managerial/professional staff; or
- managerial/professional staff only.

The apparent exclusion from the sample of personnel directors who have direct responsibility for blue collar staff is, in itself, an important finding, and one which could be interpreted in a number of ways. Blue collar workers may not be considered the primary target of work and family issues because they represent, in the main, a male dominated sector of the labour force. This interpretation suggests that the essential

link between 'family' and female workers remains implicitly, if not explicitly, intact within at least some Metropolitan Toronto employment establishments.

Support for this interpretation is clearly in evidence when the content of interviews is examined for the types of associations made by personnel staff. Many comments about the interest in or difficulties encountered when a balance between family and work is sought are in reference specifically to female staff.

"We're reasonably sensitive to the problems that mothers have. If the child is sick...although I wouldn't say we're overly sensitive. We don't bend over backwards if that's a problem".

or...

"Some women don't feel that they need to be the primary breadwinner in the family. They want to combine work and motherhood, and they want to keep a finger in the pie. My wife is like that -- she works part-time".

or...

"I have read in the press, from time to time you see articles where the males stay home with the baby during that formative time...I don't know, it may just be my belief that biologically, the mother may want the closeness in that time as opposed to the father. I think very often the woman wants that time with the child, that closeness. She's carried the baby for nine months and she may want to continue that closeness".

Of course, the realities of the workplace may lend support to the view that more flexible hours or shorter work weeks are oriented towards female employees. Almost without exception, employers claim that requests for part-time or other non-traditional working arrangements come from female staff. Furthermore, if a program of part-time work, work-at-home, or job-sharing is in place, participants are, it would seem, most likely to be female.

Another interpretation of the exclusion of blue collar representation among study participants derives from the 'head office' nature of the sample. Because head office functions tend to be administrative rather than production oriented, personnel representatives within these offices may have much broader familiarity with administrative functions than with the on-line, production functions. They are, in the main, unwilling or unable to discuss the situations "in the plant" or "in the mills", etc.

The presence of bargaining units also seems to influence the amount and type of information a personnel representative is ready or willing to supply. In virtually none of the interviews was a respondent prepared to discuss the position of bargaining units. The interests of organized labour are, therefore, unstated throughout these interviews, with the exception of the occasional comment about the derivation of a proposed or implemented program. In short, 'Management' representatives are very reluctant to offer their opinions about the concerns, strategies or plans of bargaining units. The result of this reluctance is an absence of information on the needs and interests of the blue collar segments of the corporations included in the sample.

B. TERMINOLOGY

"Programs" Or "Situations"

In order to obtain details of different alternative work arrangements, each employer was asked to describe, in detail, the development and scope of one of the topics¹ included in the

¹Part-time with pro-rated benefits, flex-time, extended maternity leave, paternity and adoption leave, daycare, work-at-home, job-sharing and personal leave.

questionnaire. Additionally, each was asked to discuss, in less detail, other options available to employees. The results of these descriptive sections of the interviews suggest that the use of terms which generally connote systematic and/or widespread implementation are usually inappropriate. That is, terms such as "policy" or "program" are less precise than are "arrangements", or "situations" in depicting the employer's view, and in fact the scope of several alternatives available to employees. Part-time work with pro-rated benefits, job-sharing, and personal leave for the care of family members are the alternatives most likely to be described as 'ad hoc' or individual arrangements.

Conversely, flex-time, work-at-home, daycare and various parental leave options are more apt to be described as policies or programs. These, where they exist as well as in the hypothetical consideration of them, are perceived as privileges conferred by the employer to all or to sizeable numbers of the staff. As such, regulations for such "programs" are encoded in personnel manuals. They are sanctioned by the employer, and widely adopted at the workplace.

In a number of cases, alternative work arrangements not accorded 'policy' status develop from a private request by an individual employee. Almost without exception, in handling these requests, employers characterize themselves as being:

- "flexible";
- "willing to consider alternatives"; and
- "a caring employer".

The result of these private negotiations between an employer and employee may be the establishment of an alternative

work arrangement, but in the majority of cases described in the interviews, is not entrenched as "policy" or as a "program". Instead, one of two scenarios are described:

- the situation remains a private one, is not widely publicized by the personnel department, and each future request is handled in the same manner as the first -- that is, on the merits of the case;
- the situation is portrayed as an "experiment" or a "pilot" program and is publicized by the personnel department. Participation is commonly prompted by requests emanating from individual employees.

A cogent argument could be made that the 'policy' alternatives or services are, in effect, a later stage in the evolution of employer-employee relationships. The arrangements described as ones derived from individual requests may develop into policies in the future. Throughout the interviews there is evidence to suggest that this evolution will occur, and evidence to support the opposite view. For example, a personnel manager who anticipates senior management resistance to a formalized program offering a part-time option to employees consciously elects to increase use of such an option informally. By so doing, she can establish viable examples of the option so that, when the time comes to consider it as 'a policy', it is entrenched and can be supported by its obvious success in the workplace.

A similar argument is presented by several other employers when explaining why they construct a program as a 'pilot' or an 'experiment'. These terms reduce the threat of such programs to senior management who may be uneasy or hostile about alternative work arrangements.

In essence, then, an informal adoption of alternative arrangements can represent a 'progressive' personnel department. By treading carefully and slowly, by establishing a 'foot in the door', these managers believe they can effect change without precipitating crises of control, without generating an unpleasant climate, and without having to contend with the issue of employee rights or privileges.

At the same time, an informal approach to alternative work arrangements can be motivated by other factors. Examples of these which emerged in discussions include a paternalistic or in loco parentis attitude, or, as one 'high tech' representative put it, an "employer-driven initiative". In these cases, the ad hoc nature of the alternative situation being considered for, or in fact provided to an employee is imbued with sympathy, with privilege rather than right, or with the pragmatic parameters of a sound business decision.

As noted previously, certain alternatives offered by an employer are adopted as policy or as relatively universal programs. The origin of these 'alternatives' is, in the main, prompted by one of two factors:

- legislation (either existing or impending); or
- pragmatic business decisions.

The initiation of flex-time, for example, was in most instances, sparked by Toronto Transit Commission initiatives encouraging staggered working hours to facilitate the efficiency of the transit system. Extended maternity leave (beyond the legislative requirement) was, in several cases, initiated as a result of employee requests for additional time off. Denial of such requests would result in the loss of trained, productive

staff, and because the loss of such staff would have a deleterious effect on the organization overall, extended leaves were granted. In essence, then, a 'benefit' such as extended maternity leave was institutionalized for 'business' reasons rather than because of a perception that new mothers had a right to more time off their jobs after the birth of their baby.

Prior to exploring in detail the process by which employers come to offer the programs or situations they claim to provide, it is important to understand the range of meanings assigned to each of the 'alternatives' listed in the Working Families questionnaire.

- Flex-time

In several instances, flex-time is taken to mean a core period during which all employees are required to be at work, with flexible starting and stopping times, and a minimum number of hours worked over a specified time period. For some employers, the time period is a day, for others it is a week, and for one, it is a calendar year.

Among those abiding by this definition, some permit employees to accumulate a fixed number of 'credit' hours. These are extra hours worked in one period that can be 'saved' in order to take an afternoon off, or to visit the doctor, or care for a sick child. Again, in one instance, flex-time is utilized to cover peak and valley business requirements. That is, the overtime accumulated during 'peak' workloads is charged against fewer hours in slower periods during the year. If the net result is more than the prescribed number of hours for the year, the employee is paid for the additional hours or can take them in the form of extra paid holiday.

In other cases, flex-time has been re-named "variable" hours. This system does not provide for the accumulation of extra hours over a fixed period. Instead, it permits employees to specify the time of day they plan to arrive and leave each day, as long as it meets the minimum daily work requirement and ensures that the employee is present during a core period.

Further variations on flexible working hours include a one-half hour flexibility at each end of the day, established to correspond to a specific bus schedule; and "compressed work weeks". In both instances in which compressed work weeks were described, they entail three twelve hour shifts followed by four days off. The compressed weeks are not necessarily contained within the traditional Monday to Friday workweek.

- Part-Time With Pro-Rated Benefits

The term "part-time" has a host of meanings. In some cases, it entails pro-rated benefits. In at least one case, it yields full benefits to an employee who works at least 22 hours a week. In some instances, part-time staff are excluded completely from company benefit schemes.

Part-time arrangements also take a variety of forms. Half days on a regular schedule, two or three full days per week on a regular basis, on-call status, and 'after-hours' mini shifts are all mentioned when personnel representatives describe their 'part-time' arrangements.

- Work-At-Home

As a concept, work-at-home seems to be clearly understood by respondents. To some, however, it connotes any type of work

undertaken by the employee in the employee's home whereas to others it is relatively firmly linked to "telecommuting". This latter concept, in turn, involves the physical presence of electronic data entry equipment in a person's home. Entry of the company's data is undertaken by the individual at specified times, or on a piecework basis.

- Personal Leave

Personal leave is most commonly associated with "compassionate leave", "bereavement leave", "educational leave" and/or a leave of absence. According to most employers, the provision of a special paid leave for purposes of caring for sick children or elderly household members is not specifically tied to this term. Instead, such days are allotted at the discretion of a supervisor or manager and may, therefore, fall under the category of 'personal leave', might be taken without pay, or could be charged against the employee's sick leave or vacation.

In cases where additional hours or days can be accumulated as a result of a flex-time situation, it is clear that the employer expects that these days will be "saved and used when her child is sick -- once we put in the flex-time system, she can't stay home with a sick child and charge it to sick leave -- it is against the rules".

- Extended Maternity, Paternity And Adoption Benefits

Instances of paternity leave are rare within the sample, but definitions seem to range from a day, to a week, to the "same benefits we offer women, if the father wants to take it".

The benefits offered women are quite variable. Some employers augment the UIC benefits so that the mother's salary is

close to her rate of pay (figures cited range from 85% to 92%). In one case, this subsidy covers the first six weeks of UIC benefit. Other examples of maternity benefits include job security for up to six months after the employee leaves to have her baby. Among employers offering this benefit, some pay all, some pay a portion, and some pay none of the costs required to keep the employee covered by the company's benefits package (where these costs are not covered, the employee can make the contribution herself).

Extensions of maternity leave beyond the seventeen week requirement are universally available to employees in several companies, whereas in others, applications must be made by the employee to extend her leave. The length of the extension also varies from organization to organization.

- Job-Sharing

One employer's "job-sharing" is another employer's "part-time". The definition of job-sharing seems to depend on the manner in which the situation arose within the company. If two individuals approached the employer and asked to share a job, with one working three days a week and the other working two days a week, the employer may call this "job-sharing". If, on the other hand, a full-time employee wishes to cut back her commitment from five to three or two days a week, and another person is hired to complete the five day week, the employer may refer to this arrangement as "part-time".

Despite this confusion, there appears to be a general feeling that a shared job should refer to a single position which was, at one time, filled by a single staff member and is now filled by two people.

C. WHY DO ALTERNATIVE WORK PROGRAMS OR SITUATIONS ARISE?

The explanations offered for the adoption or consideration of alternative work arrangements are complex.

To comprehend the diversity of factors at play in the decision, it is necessary to separate the "motivating event" from the "overall environment" in which the company operates. The list on the following page displays the types of concerns employers provide in these two categories.

"Environmental Factors"

Increase in number of women in the work force

Changes in labour/human rights legislation (equity employment, affirmative action, etc.)

Increased specialization and training of traditionally "unskilled" or minimally skilled clerical staff

Corporate social consciousness/demands of corporate citizenship

To remain "competitive" for top talent in the job market

To match or better the 'benefits' of "union shops"

Changes in employee attitudes:

- more 'lifestyle' concerns
- reduction in the "lifer" mentality

"Motivating Event"

Potential loss of a highly trained employee

Perceived training costs to replace employees leaving because of work/family stress

Desire to utilize expensive electronic equipment for more hours than traditional work schedules permit

Inclusion in a proposed collective agreement

Employee request for 'personal reasons'

Recognition of the boring, repetitive nature of a job

Conspicuous by their absence are statements of direct interest in facilitating the dual roles of parent and worker. Conversely, and not surprisingly, conspicuous by their presence are statements that reflect companies' interest in "getting the work done", in "increased efficiency" and/or "increased productivity". Regardless of how interested an employer is in providing a suitable or positive work environment, in the final analysis, employer after employer notes that the work must "get done", and the shareholders, the taxpayers and/or the private owners must feel assured that the firm is adopting 'reasonable' and profitable policies.

Leaders And Followers

An interview with a public sector respondent reveals an interesting perception:

"We have an obligation in the social areas. Because we are so tied to government, and the directions they are heading in the social areas, we have to be something of a leader in this area. It is part of our role and our responsibility. At the same time, in terms of wages and agreements with employees, we should not be leaders. We should follow industry standards".

Another representative of the public sector suggests that:

"It is, of course, much easier for the public sector to do these things [introduce progressive social programs for employees]. The government makes the decision that it wants something to happen, and they can just increase taxes to pay for it. We do what we are told to do, and don't have to worry about the money. If the government wants it to happen, they get the money to make it happen. It is much different in the private sector. They operate in a competitive environment. They'd have to raise their prices, and then might not be competitive..."

Most individuals interviewed suggest that they have means of surveying developments in allied industries or in competitive environments. Awareness of new developments is simply a requirement of the personnel manager's job. At the same time,

these company representatives take their lead from the corporate philosophy and image of their employer. Their own success as employees is, it would seem, in some ways tied to the consonance between the programs they develop or maintain and the corporate identity.

In this sense, then, some personnel representatives describe their companies as leaders, as 'progressive', as being involved in the development of alternative situations "long before others", and/or as "innovative". Some refer to the differences between their current employer and other companies they have worked for as a means of demonstrating the impact of corporate attitude or positioning on personnel policy. Clearly, then, the locus of decision making about personnel policies does not reside solely in the individuals interviewed. These individuals are not, by and large, policy decision makers. Instead, they are suggestion makers, surveyors of ideas and competitive offerings, and implementers.

"We are not pioneers", but the spokesperson considers her company to be a "conscientious employer". Provisions are made in subtle ways to facilitate the needs of staff members -- part-time work for valuable staff is offered, but...

"I don't think daycare would ever be considered here. There is a line between home and work, and I don't think they [management] would be prepared to cross that line. Besides, our people don't have a problem with daycare. They make their own arrangements".

Another respondent comments that her employer has a "management with small town values", implying that the traditional sex roles are implicitly supported by management. It is also a "very old business -- it's been around for over 100 years". Change is slow in coming, both in terms of values and programs. These are companies, which, by their own admission, are only slowly coming into the "modern age". Their senior

personnel staff and the programs they offer are characterized by caution. In several instances, the only impetus for the introduction of programs or situations of the type under study is existing or impending legislation.

Other 'traditional' employers, again by their own admission, note that they are followers, or occasionally find themselves catapulted into leadership positions in personnel policy as a result of stiff competition for qualified staff. "Employees expect more now than they used to"; "they shop around and see where they can get the best deal"; "they will move if someone is offering something better elsewhere".

"Top Down/Bottom Up"

In some ways, then, changes in employee expectations can be viewed as a motivation for alterations in the workplace. This, in turn, constitutes "bottom up" pressure for change.

The pressure takes several forms:

- direct threat -- the employee will leave or will not join if not offered an alternative situation; or
- diffused, almost atmospheric changes in the perceived responsibilities of an employer.

It should also be noted that the age of the individual interviewed figures as a variable in attitudes towards alternative work arrangements. Personnel managers' own expectations of employees and employers are, at least to some extent, a function of their work history. Thus, it is not surprising that receptivity to 'new' ideas is more common among younger individuals than it is among those who came of age as personnel

managers during a more traditional era. The degree to which they can identify with the needs and interests of employees seeking alternative work arrangements is also an important factor in:

- the amount of support an employee will be given in the pursuit of an alternative, and the amount of sympathy/empathy that will be offered to the strains between work and family; and
- the extent to which personnel officers are prepared to initiate policy changes with senior management.

Involvement with and commitment to non-traditional work arrangements on the part of a personnel director can, therefore, constitute a 'middle up/down' pressure within the organization. As one noted:

"I'd expected that as the sixty year olds moved off the board [of directors] things would change. You know, it is amazing how many forty and forty-five year olds are really sixty year olds in terms of their attitudes. They seem to be just like the older men -- I guess their wives are home, and they don't see a problem. Their lives look just like their fathers'."

In this situation, the respondent is considerably more receptive to alternative situations than is his board of directors. Thus, he takes small, unobtrusive steps that might not otherwise occur.

Policy makers, unlike personnel directors, are most apt to be senior managers or members of a board of directors. Thus, in many of the situations described in the interviews, the individual responsible for determining the viability of part-time work, shared jobs, or work-at-home is not the person responsible for the initial decision. There are, of course, exceptions. As mentioned previously, the subtle or backdoor approach to policy development (introducing the programs in an informal manner until they are sufficiently widespread to constitute the basis for policy) constitutes a mechanism for effecting change, almost in spite of 'top down' policy.

Top down policy making is, it would, seem a more critical construct when the alternative arrangement or situation has significant financial implications. That is, an ad hoc arrangement which does not require a capital outlay is more likely to be undertaken in an unobtrusive manner by a personnel director than is one which will 'cost money'. For this reason, extended maternity benefits, paternity benefits, work-at-home (because of the expense of supplying electronic data processing equipment), and daycare seem to require policy decisions at the senior level. In contrast, the occasional part-time situation or shared job is more likely to be undertaken at the discretion of the personnel department without a policy directive.

The Employees

The threat of withdrawal of valuable service seems to be a common motivation for employers to consider alternative arrangements. Clearly, there is recognition among personnel managers that training and recruitment investments ought to be protected, where possible. Thus, in order to 'keep good employees', individual arrangements are established.

The level of the employee being discussed in the context of alternative work situations also plays an important role in the employer's decision-making process. Generally speaking, the more skilled and difficult to replace an employee is, the more likely it is that an arrangement will be considered. In several situations described by employers, the potential loss of a "good employee" constitutes the impetus for considering an alternative:

"She came to us after she had her baby and was back at work. She's an excellent [professional] and we didn't want to lose her, but she said that she found she couldn't give 100% at home and 100% here, so she thought she should stay home. Now she's working here three days a week".

or...

"We had an excellent technician and she didn't want to work full-time anymore. She was ready to leave. People like her are hard to find, so we met with her. As it turned out, she was willing to stay if we could offer something less than full-time. She had a friend who would share the job with her -- 3 and 2 days a week. So we tried it. It's working beautifully".

In contrast, implementation of a compressed work week for some clerical staff was prompted because...

"We are a large firm and we found we just couldn't get the work out. We had to bring in extra staff to help out and to keep our word processing centre operating more hours per week. We don't actively look for part-time staff -- there's too much administration involved, but we have several good secretaries who work part-time".

In other instances, the nature of the work itself prompts a change in the arrangements...

"We used to have a company cafeteria and then got a contract with a catering company. The cafeteria staff no longer have as much work to do -- just setting up, serving...so they now work part-time [instead of full-time]".

Organized Labour

Bargaining units also provide an impetus for alternative work arrangements. In fact, they do so in two ways -- directly and indirectly. Direct change in the workplace derives from inclusion of the program or policy as an item for negotiation in a collective agreement. Indirect prompting derives from a non-union shop's interest in remaining competitive with unionized competitors.

Specific examples of alternative arrangements raised for consideration as a result of organized labour's efforts include on-site daycare, compressed work weeks, extended maternity leave and paternity leave. As noted, previously, these are the types of alternatives most appropriately described as programs or policies. Organized labour's efforts are, it would seem,

supportive of broadly-based benefits. The same energy and organization, however, seems to mitigate against certain other alternative programs. In the words of one employer...

"I've explored part-time work with my staff...I came across a questionnaire and gave it to my staff. Of course, they're not in the bargaining unit. You know, our union doesn't look very kindly on part-time work".

Indirect union initiatives were specified in several instances. If a particular policy, such as extended maternity benefits or compressed work weeks, is incorporated into a union agreement, non-union competitors claim that it behooves them to offer similar or slightly better programs. If they did not 'match' the union benefits, they would lose staff to their unionized competitors.

Societal Change

As specified at the outset of this chapter, there is an awareness that the values of society are changing. These changes are already having an impact on the employment practices of firms included in this study, and, according to these respondents, will continue to do so.

What, precisely, is changing? Personnel professionals are not of a single voice in their comments about changing values. Some look at modern technology, and concepts such as telecommuting as "the answer to daycare problem". Others look at the same technology as a means of reducing their overheads and increasing productivity. Some regard the increased presence of women, and most importantly, potential mothers, in the workforce as a force to be reckoned with; as a new situation that requires new solutions. Others regard this same influx of females as a threat to the status quo.

An increase in emphasis on the quality of life as well as on job security among both male and female staff is, according to

some employers, having a dramatic impact on the types of benefits and alternative arrangements that will have to be considered in the future. The expectation that an employee will be with the firm "for life" is fading. The new generation wants mobility --

"It used to be that a pension was an award for service, conferred to an employee at the end of his career. Now, people expect pensions, and there is new legislation that will require them to be even more mobile. These people want to take their pensions with them to their next job."

Employees want social benefits -- "dental plans used to be a real rarity -- now everybody offers them". Employers set up fitness centres, offer retirement counselling, parental counselling, financial management courses, and the like. These are new responses to changes in the labour force.

In most cases, the examples offered by employers when describing changes in employee expectations do not focus on the needs of parents. Perhaps implicit in this is the expectation that the employee has a life outside of the work environment, and is personally responsible for keeping this dimension of his or her life intact and functioning. Thus, as one personnel manager notes, childcare is a private issue; another questions the appropriateness of an employer providing legal counselling in divorces, etc. As one man states, "It all depends on your philosophy".

The social responsibility of an employer is clearly at issue, and is recognized as such by most individuals interviewed. The amount of social responsibility employers are prepared to take, and the form it will take, however, vary tremendously.

D. CASE HISTORIES

Terminology and general motivational and attitudinal constructs at play within the sample of employers included in this study have been presented. These words and ideas constitute

the background against which individual programs or situations are fostered or impeded in their growth. In the subsequent analysis, a case history approach is adopted in order to provide a deeper understanding of the metamorphosis of various programs or situations defined as alternative work arrangement.

Daycare

- An On-Site Daycare Centre

Only one respondent currently maintains an on-site daycare centre. In this case, the motivation for the centre was employee-based. A group of employees undertook all the necessary studies to determine need, and presented their position on the feasibility and requirements of such a centre to management. Management made the decision to support the concept in several specific ways:

- provision of space on the premises;
- a capital grant for improvements to the space.

This 'support' required management endorsement because of the capital outlay involved, and because, in some sense, it was a policy issue.

The staffing, running of the daycare program, and all other details of the centre are entrusted to a committee of employees. In effect, the centre received the sanction of management, but its functioning and ultimate success or failure are the responsibility of employees.

Measurement of the centre's success or impact on staff are not undertaken by management. Again, these are seen to be the responsibility of the employee committee.

Despite the fact that management does not take responsibility for the functioning of the on-site daycare centre, there is clearly a feeling of pride in this 'showcase' institution. It lends to the employer a leadership role in social programming, is a highly visible and widely publicized symbol that, according to the spokesperson interviewed, reflects positively on his organization.

- Daycare As A Future Possibility

Although only one institution in the sample offers on-site daycare, several individuals interviewed refer to on-site daycare as an issue that might be faced in the future. Reactions to the concept vary widely.

In some cases, the division between home and work seems to be rigidly drawn. Daycare is a home problem that has nothing to do with the workplace. This sentiment is expressed in a number of ways -- the respondent suggests that his or her staff have never raised the issue; that the daycare needs of employees are obviously met since people manage to arrive at work without their children; and/or that the particular workplace would be totally inappropriate for a daycare centre.

Some employers submit that their staff is not sufficiently large to justify consideration of a daycare centre. In other instances, daycare is being bandied about as a possibility -- something that might be looked into in the future, or has already been the subject of a feasibility/need study. In the cases in which these studies have been undertaken but no centre has materialized, the impetus for the survey tends to derive from management rather than from employees.

Explanations for lack of employee enthusiasm for an on-site daycare centre tend to focus on satisfaction with existing arrangements, an unwillingness to bring the child into downtown or industrial locations, an unwillingness to rely on public transportation at rush hours for the transport of small children, a desire for neighbourhood contacts for the child as he/she approaches school age, and the assignment of all parental responsibility for the child's transport and care during the day to the one parent employed on the site.

Part-Time Work With Pro-Rated Benefits

In most cases, the idea of a part-time position emanates from an employee who "has been with the company for a long time". The individual's skills and work style are known and trusted. As stated previously, this employee is almost without exception, a female. She typically leaves the job to have a child, and at the end of her maternity leave, is not prepared to return to the work force on a full-time basis. "Rather than losing her altogether, we take her back part-time. Usually, when her child gets older, she increases her hours, and pretty soon, we have her back full-time."

This part-time staff member will, in some cases be offered pro-rated benefits. Often, however, she is not. The benefit scheme is established for employees working a minimum number of hours per week, and in her part-time capacity, she does not qualify. No excuses are offered for the absence of pro-rated benefits in the situations where none are provided. One employer suggests that part-time female staff "don't want benefits -- we tell them, here's X amount of money. You can take it in benefits or in salary. Which way do you want it? They want it in their salary -- they get benefits through their spouse."

In a similar vein, another personnel manager indicates that he asked his female clerical staff if they desired a part-time option, and they responded in the negative -- "really, it is an economic thing. They want the extra money."

Discussions of part-time situations are persistently interspersed with comments suggesting the ad hoc nature of the arrangement: "We look at each request individually"; "if it makes sense in the situation"; "as long as the work gets done". The tone of these discussions also suggests that a favour is being done for the employee. She is an 'exception', although an exception which does not inconvenience the employer to any significant extent. In fact, the situation seems to be offered only when some need of the employer is being met:

"We're thinking about part-time because there are times in the day, like lunch, that we can't keep it [a specific function] covered. We could bring people in for a few hours a day to help us through this."

or...

"We don't want to have to retrain someone -- it is expensive."

or...

"We like to use known entities. They know our system and we know them. When we need extra staff, we go to people who have been here before, and bring them back part-time."

It should be noted that occasional part-time positions to cover peak work situations are included in the definition of this category by some employers. These jobs originate to meet a specific employer need and are acknowledged to be 'temporary' at the outset. This form of 'pick-up' part-time staff is rarely included in a benefit scheme.

While use of part-time employees offers advantages to some employers, others identify disadvantages associated with part-time workers. These include:

- more administrative/supervision time and, therefore, costs;
- limited access to staff when questions arise; and
- difficulties in determining responsibility for the work undertaken if two people are filling a full-time slot in the firm.

In fact, several employers note that they do not actively seek permanent part-time staff. They respond to a request from an existing employee, but anticipate no structural change in their employment practices to accommodate part-time workers -- "It's too much trouble".

Employers who offer part-time alternatives indicate that they have no "hard data" on which to determine the success of these situations. There are claims that supervisory personnel complain that more administrative time is involved, but these claims are not of a particularly dramatic nature, and personnel managers seem quite prepared to sustain the alternative situations in spite of them.

When specifically asked to comment on the impact part-time positions have had within the workplace, most employers note that the impact is minimal. Some advertise the situations to the staff via employee newsletters and the like whereas others make no effort to communicate the existence of part-time staff members. Regardless of their willingness to communicate, employers note that they have not been "swamped with requests" for part-time positions.

Perhaps because of perceived (and likely, real) economic necessity, people involved in the workforce are expected to work full-time. The part-time position is, at least for some employers, viewed as a bridge to get a valuable employee through the years of a young family. If this form of alternative situation continues to be viewed in this manner, it is unlikely that the ad hoc development of such a situation will change in the near future.

Job-Sharing

"There was one person on reception, and we realized what a boring job it really was. No one wanted to stay there for very long. So, we decided to split the job between two people".

Clearly, this shared job came into existence as a result of management recognition of a situation drawn to their attention by high turnover. In another firm, a shared job was adopted because the individual filling the position on a full-time basis wanted to work fewer days. Rather than lose her altogether, the firm offered to have the single position split between two people. "Unfortunately, from what I've heard, it didn't work out too well -- one person really pulled her weight, and the other one didn't. The office manager out there was really fed up, and now the original employee is back at the job full-time."

As stated previously, the concepts of part-time and job-sharing are not mutually exclusive ones. The positions are both characterized as appropriate for female and/or clerical/administrative positions, but are unlikely to be viewed as suitable for male staff and/or managerial/professional staff. Certain respondents suggest that "they can't imagine a man asking to work part-time or to share a job" or make the assumption

(either stated or implied) that women are working for different reasons, that women are not the primary breadwinners, that they are not career driven in the same ways men are.

Like part-time work, consideration of shared jobs poses questions of how benefits are to be handled (in one case, they are pro-rated; in another case, each of the job sharers receives full benefits), how supervision is to be handled, how much additional supervisory time will be required to administer the new position.

Perceived benefits of shared jobs are thought to include the firm's ability to keep staff who are trained and accustomed to the work environment and to simplify coverage of vacations and sick days with a person familiar with the tasks at hand. As is the case with all other examples of alternative work situations described in detail in this analysis, the companies which offer job-sharing do so both to "help her keep her job", and because they reduce their own costs for recruitment and training, and minimize office disruption.

Work-At-Home

Two instances of work-at-home are detailed in the interviews, and they are quite different in their focus and orientation.

- Contractors

In one instance, the employer has four or five women who work at home. A data entry terminal is installed in the home, and materials are sent to the individual from the company's downtown location. Entry is undertaken at the worker's convenience, as long as deadlines are met.

The program was initiated as a way of saving space, and therefore, overhead costs. The same data entry equipment would have been required regardless of the location. According to the personnel manager, these individuals are not prepared to come downtown to work, and if they were not provided with work-at-home, they would not otherwise be working for the firm. Since they are perceived to be very competent in their assigned tasks, the employer claims that the company benefits from having these people available. They are not, however, employees of the firm. As such, they receive no benefits from the firm.

In turn, the employer notes that the benefits of flexibility and the tax advantages of being able to write off some of their household expenses as business expenses are adequate compensation for the absence of employer-provided benefits.

In addition to reducing the employer's capital outlay for office space, a further advantage of this work-at-home situation relates to productivity. The employer claims that unlike the in-office data entry employee, those who work at home do not suffer the same fatigue. They have more "fresh starts" in their day because they are unlikely to sit down for a straight seven hours to enter data. The reduction in fatigue produces fewer errors, and is regarded as a significant benefit for the employer.

Obviously, in this situation, there is no interest in the extent to which the at-home individual feels a part of the firm. Since the women who work from home are not employees, but subcontractors, the issue of morale or the camaraderie of the workplace are not considered relevant issues for the 'prime contractor'. Despite her lack of corporate interest in the

home-worker's welfare, the personnel manager thinks of these individuals as being completely satisfied with their working arrangements.

- Employees

The second instance of work-at-home is more elaborate than the one described above, and involves employees of the firm. It began as a pilot project, and during this phase was subjected to massive assessment by the firm. It should be said that the employer conceives the project as 'innovative', and is quite excited about and proud of it.

The initial decision to attempt a work-at-home arrangement was employer motivated. It began after a lengthy survey of similar arrangements in allied industries in the United States, and was initiated with two employees. These individuals were selected from volunteers from the pool of existing staff. As with the situation described above, the task is data entry via electronic data entry terminals installed in the home. As such, the two basic requirements for the potential candidate were that she live a reasonable distance from the main operation (for transmission cable), and that space in the home be dedicated to the equipment that would be installed. One woman with a child at home and one with no children at home were selected for the pilot.

During the pilot stage of the project, daily questionnaires were administered to participants covering topics related to the task itself, their social and psychological adjustment to the at-home situation, and the like. Personal interviews were conducted at several points during the pilot stage. Clearly, the employer was concerned about the adjustment his staff would make to this novel working arrangement.

Once the pilot was deemed successful, more recruits were sought from existing staff, and the program now has expanded to nine installations. In the next four to five years, it is expected to increase to 150 home-workers since, during this time period, more and more of the organization's operations (e.g. billings) will be computerized. The proposed expansion is also predicated on the fact that the company has realized measurable benefits in terms of increased productivity and reduced absenteeism.

The home-workers have developed a network among themselves, and, according to the respondent "feel more involved with their work now and more a part of things than they ever did when they worked here (on-site)". Additionally, this form of working arrangement is deemed to be "an answer to the daycare problem".

The only specific problem mentioned in the context of this program pertains to the costs of distributing documents for entry to the home-workers.

Based on these two examples, it would seem that work-at-home, because of the financial commitment required to install equipment and cables, must generate a measurable financial return. The two programs discussed here meet this objective, and according to these personnel representatives are also serving the needs of mothers with children. Work-at-home, it is claimed, permits flexibility, reduces stress over childcare, and reduces transportation and clothing costs for the employee.

- The Future

The installation of terminals in the home is being undertaken and/or considered by other employers as well. In some cases, the installation is undertaken to permit more flexibility

to managerial/professional staff. This form of work-at-home extends rather than replaces the time commitment made by an employee. It too is perceived to offer benefits to working parents, since the parent no longer has to stay late at the office. Instead, the overtime can be scheduled during non-office time, at the convenience of the employee.

In other cases, work-at-home is conceptualized as a clerical, data entry task. Employers exploring this type of home work are, in the main, concerned about issues of control -- once the employees are out of the workplace, are they "really employees? What's the difference between these people and a sub-contractor?"; of personal privacy; of corporate privacy; and about the financial aspect of such arrangements. How much would it cost; what would they save?

Clearly, the message conveyed by the interviews conducted is that a work-at-home situation might be initiated by an employer if it has clear benefits to the employer. What benefits might accrue to the home-worker's ability to juggle work and family would be a secondary, and to a large extent, incidental benefit.

Flex-Time

Two types of flex-time exemplified in discussions are particularly pertinent to the Working Families Project. One of these involves the accumulation of hours over a fixed period of time for later use at the discretion of the employee. The second is a compressed work week.

- Accumulated Hours

One employer instituted a flex-time system in order to help the company through severe peaks and valleys in the workload.

The system was conceptualized by senior management, designed by a hired consultant and implemented at the direction of the company's management.

This form of flex-time requires each employee to "punch in and out" (using a time clock) and to be present for a core period each day. Hours worked that exceed the minimum work requirement are accumulated. At the end of a year, an employee's annual hours are assessed. If they exceed the stipulated minimum, the employee is paid overtime or given additional paid holiday.

Institution of the system met with some employee resistance because "time clocks were not popular" but according to the employer, there is now widespread satisfaction with the system and it is presented to potential employees as a benefit offered by the firm.

"It really helps single mothers. They usually build up a few extra days and keep them in reserve for an emergency -- when their child is sick, needs to go to the doctor..."

The employer claims that a significant reduction in sick days used by staff is a beneficial by-product of the program. At the same time, employees are no longer permitted to use their sick time for the care of other family members. They are now expected to manage these situations within the flex-time arrangement. This employer fails to note the stress that the same single parent might feel during a "peak period when people standardly put in 80 hour weeks".

- Compressed Work Weeks

Two examples of compressed work weeks were discussed in detail. One was prompted by a change in a collective agreement that had, in turn, dramatic implications for a staffing model.

The compressed work week was proposed as a means of solving the staffing crisis. It was implemented as a "pilot project", with the endorsement of the bargaining unit and management.

The pilot, comprised of three consecutive 12 hour shifts followed by four days off, proved successful in meeting the staffing requirements and was mutually accepted by 'both sides' for broader implementation.

Management seems to have accepted the model, if somewhat grudgingly. Certain problems arise from management's perspective:

- greater administrative time;
- additional costs because staff may have to be called in on 'off days' and must be paid for this time; and
- reduced 'freshness' of the staff.

The extended 'off' period permits employees to take on second jobs and, according to the employer, many do so. The net result of three long shifts followed by another job rather than leisure is a less refreshed employee than was anticipated. Employees are, on the other hand, said to be quite satisfied with the program.

A second example of a compressed work week was prompted by senior management subsequent to the creation of a costly word processing centre. Expensive equipment was, in the minds of senior management, being underutilized. By maintaining the standard 9 to 5 schedule for existing employees, and adding a compressed work week on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday (12 hours per day) for newly recruited employees, more 'up' time was obtained.

All word processing staff is female, and "some really like the compressed work week. They only have to make childcare arrangements for 2 days [Monday/Tuesday] and then are home for the rest of the week". This manager is not, however, especially interested in meeting the needs of working parents. She is careful to remind the interviewer that decisions made by the company derive from business rather than personal needs.

Personal Leave

Within the sample there are virtually no examples of personal leave "programs" specifically designed to permit the employee to stay home to care for a sick or ailing family member.

At the same time, there is virtually no employer who suggests that the occasional paid day would not be granted to cover these situations. 'Discretion' is a key word in discussions of personal leave. An employee is expected to exercise discretion in taking time off for 'family matters' and the discretion of an immediate supervisor is the main determinant in the granting of such personal leave. 'Understanding' is also a commonly used term in these discussions:

"We understand that these things happen [children get sick] from time to time...it's only when it is abused...when it happens too often."

or...

"We try to be understanding. Sure, people take occasional days off because their children are sick."

It could be argued that the 'extra hours' accrued in flex-time programs constitute an employer-supported mechanism for handling sick children. The fact that employers who offer such a program report reduced absenteeism might support this contention.

One other employer-prompted program could also be seen to meet the need for the type of personal leave under consideration here. This employer used to provide four extra days of paid holiday (beyond the statutory requirements) to all staff. The days were fixed such that they lengthened a long weekend (to four days). They have since been changed to "floaters" -- four days that an employee has at his or her disposal to use throughout the year. These days can be used at the discretion of employees, and according to the employer, are commonly taken to cover family-related crises.

Maternity, Paternity, And Adoption Leave

Some employers quite consciously make no effort to extend maternity benefits beyond the legal requirements because "it is just too hard on a company like ours -- we can't find qualified people to replace those away having children. By the time we get someone trained, it is too late". In other cases, no comments are offered to explain why only the legal requirements are met in their maternity benefit offerings. The seventeen weeks would seem to be accepted as the 'status quo', and require no explanation or defense.

Extensions of maternity benefits where they exist, take different forms:

- the UIC benefits are supplemented by the employer to meet a pre-arranged percentage of the employee's salary for a fixed period of time;
- an extension of the leave can be obtained by application and each is treated "on the merits of the case";

- an extension of up to six months (in total) is standardly supplied to employees, usually with no employer-supported financial benefits;
- a two month extension of the UIC leave period is standardly offered, and a further extension is available if required for medical reasons.

In one instance, extensions of the leave required approval by the board of directors.

"Since there was never any question about the requests being approved, I suggested that we just make the extension a standard policy. The bargaining unit had no problems with this, so it was done. It took up too much board time."

Unlike other alternative work arrangements, discussion of maternity leave/benefits evokes comparatively common reference to hostility or dislike at the supervisory rather than at the managerial level. Personnel managers accept the legal requirements with relative ease, knowing that they will and must act within the confines of the law. On-line supervisors, however, "are the ones who have to cope without that person -- it is hard for them, and I hear about it"; "there's grumbling, but there is nothing to be done about it."

Paternity leave is encompassed under "parental" leave for several employers. The benefits offered under these schemes are identical regardless of the sex of the parent, or whether the child is adopted or not. In other cases, provisions for adoptive leave match those offered females within the company, and no or minimal paternity leave options are available.

Adoptive leave has been accepted or incorporated into personnel policies as a result of legislative rulings. It is a 'non-issue' for most employers, since so few instances arise within any one firm.

Paternity leave, on the other hand, is a confusing concept to some employers. It is scoffed at or scorned by some who find it difficult to accept that a father would opt to stay home with the child. Others simply have not considered it, and still others believe it to be covered by personal leave provisions.

E. INFORMATION SOURCES AND NEEDS

- Sources

According to most respondents, there is no shortage of printed information about alternative work arrangements. Journals, newspapers, and trade publications are full of articles about on-site daycare, job sharing, flex-time, and the like. The pros and cons of various benefit packages are debated as are the changing perspectives of employees.

There are, in fact, considerably more sources of information than the personnel director has time or interest to follow in any detail. Frequent complaints are made about a lack of time to read the many articles and publications that cross their desks. In addition to the many printed sources of information, a more useful and trusted vehicle for information exists for most personnel representatives. Personnel and trade association, meetings, conferences and social gatherings, along with telephone access to 'contacts' in other companies, constitute the main source of information about employment practices and experience with alternative arrangements. Adherence to the notion that 'experience is the best teacher' is common among respondents. Many of these individuals claim that they are much more comfortable with the value and honesty of information passed to them from a known contact than they are with academic or trade oriented articles.

Not all respondents agree that the information they receive from colleagues is truthful since their contacts may operate in a competitive environment that makes complete honesty unlikely. Nonetheless, most people claim that they "have nothing to hide" when others seek information from them, and fully expect that their counterparts in other firms are equally truthful.

The extent of reliance on a 'network' varies. In some cases, the pressures of the job significantly reduce the time available to read publications. In these instances, the personnel director is apt to rely particularly heavily on informal telephone contact. The volume and type of printed material that crosses the desk also has a negative effect on readership:

"How do I know what to believe -- I read two totally opposite points of view on the same issue -- How do I know?"; or

"Just because it worked for the company being described in the article, how do I know it will work for us? Every company is so different -- you can't generalize. I want to talk to someone who understands my situation, someone who is in a similar position."

Several references were made to private industry surveys of benefits and work arrangements. These surveys, sponsored by participating companies, provide a means of learning what the competition is offering in terms of benefits and work arrangements, where the thinking on these subjects is going, etc. Based on the very limited sample included in this study, it would seem that such surveys are implemented and utilized only by very large employers.

Another source of information on specific programs is an external consultant. Several firms have retained the services of such a consultant in the past, and in the words of one respondent, "consultants on affirmative action and equity employment

are popping up all over the place". In one case, an "affirmative action co-ordinator" has been brought on staff; in another case, a consultant has delivered promotional materials on the planning and implementation of an on-site daycare; in another case, a flex-time program was designed by an outside consultant.

The appeal of a consultant is that the labour involved in exploring possible new options does not fall to the personnel director. Since these people already have heavy workloads, the help is welcome. From the opposite perspective, however, there are employers who believe that the whole issue of alternative working arrangements, including on-site daycare, has "been blown out of proportion. People are making these things much harder than they really are". In effect, the viewpoint represented by this individual is that a good personnel department keeps up on what is going on in its sphere of influence, is in the best position to understand the specific needs of the company, and therefore, ought to be able to work out appropriate solutions to changing personnel needs without recourse to outsiders.

- Needs

Despite the volumes of printed information and the telephone and personal contacts available to personnel directors, there are areas in which the information available is insufficient. The following list details the types of gaps some employers claim exist:

- A listing of local employers who offer specific programs such as on-site daycare, work-at-home, and job-sharing.

The availability of such a list would provide instant access to people who could describe their own experience with a

program being contemplated elsewhere. Given the extremely high value placed on 'testimonial' evidence of success (or failure) by personnel directors, the meeting of this information need could facilitate serious consideration of programs among companies 'just testing the waters'.

- Details of the manner in which 'benefit splitting' has been implemented in job-sharing or part-time arrangements.

Apparently, some employers do not have 'models' of the mechanical details that must be addressed when trying to implement certain alternative arrangements. They maintain that it seems wasteful for each company to 'create the wheel' when determining how to divide pension contributions, health and dental benefits, and the like. Provision of a range of 'workable alternatives' might help employers contemplating or instituting unusual work situations. It would certainly minimize the feeling expressed by several employers that they "are operating in the dark".

- Abstracts of government legislation and impending legislation, along with probable impact on employment policies.

Certain employers specify that they would benefit from summaries of proposed and existing legislation in the areas of equity employment, affirmative action, and the like. The value of such abstracts would, it seems, be greatly enhanced if the implications for the employer were documented. At the same time, other employers note that they have 'good contacts' within the government, and have no difficulty obtaining the necessary information from this sphere. They go on to state that the implications of legislation are so intricately tied to a specific company that generalized statements would not be of particular value.

TITLES OF THOSE INTERVIEWED IN DEPTH FOR THE WORKING
FAMILIES PROJECT*

MANAGER OF BENEFITS PROGRAM

SENIOR MANAGER OF PERSONNEL

DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL SERVICES

GENERAL MANAGER, CORPORATE HUMAN RESOURCES

HUMAN RESOURCES ADVISOR

MANAGER, PERSONNEL AND PAYROLL

RECRUITING AND ORIENTATION ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR, STAFF RELATIONS DIVISION

VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

DIRECTOR OF LABOUR RELATIONS

MANAGER OF TORONTO PERSONNEL SERVICES

PERSONNEL MANAGER

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS CONSULTANT

*Since certain respondents have the same title, these titles have not been listed more than once.